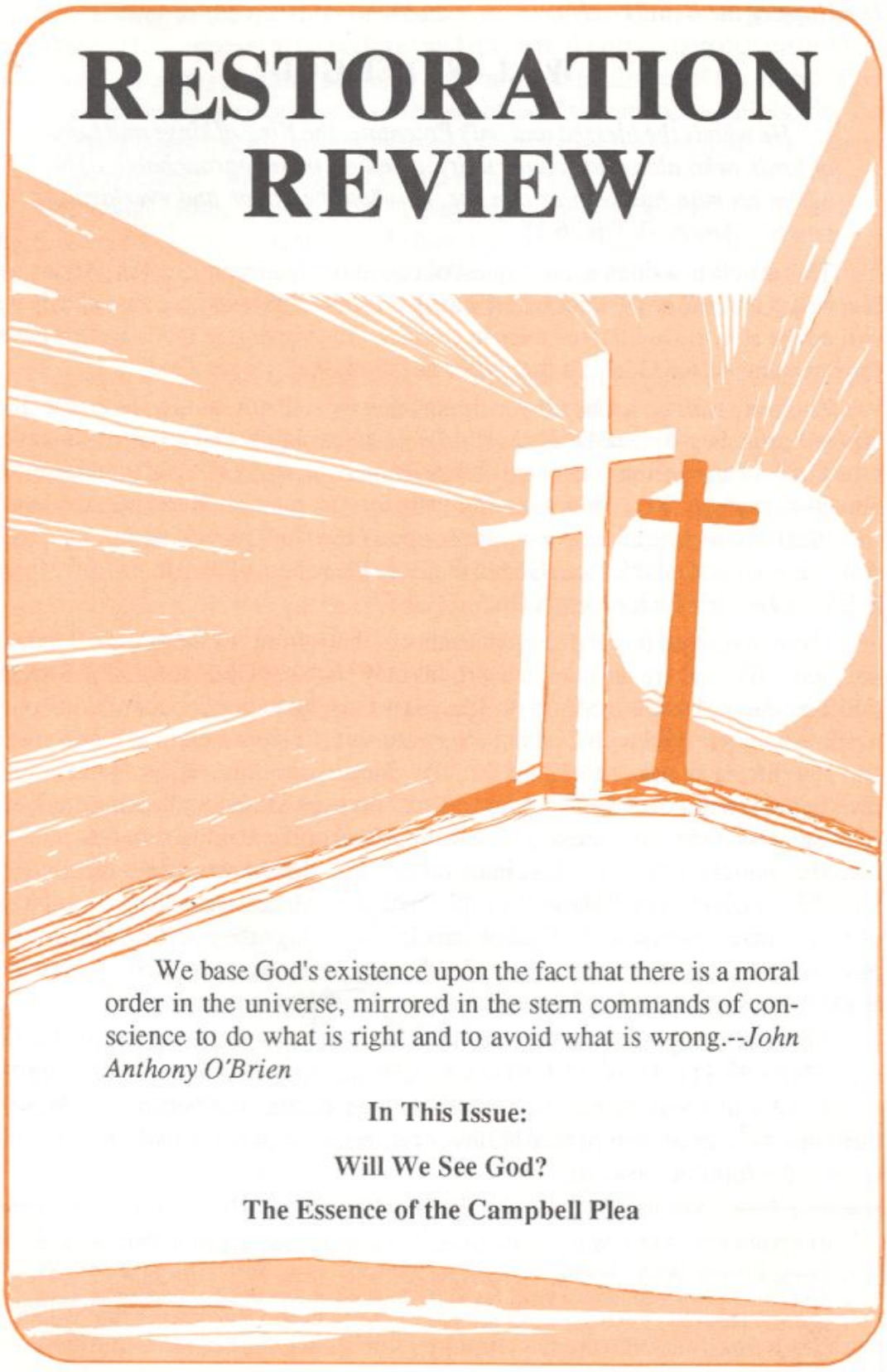
RESTORATION REVIEW



We base God's existence upon the fact that there is a moral order in the universe, mirrored in the stern commands of conscience to do what is right and to avoid what is wrong.--*John Anthony O'Brien*

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The Hope of the Believer … No. 12

WILL WE SEE GOD?

He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen. —1 Tim. 6:15

This article is written at the request of one of our readers in Benton, Arkansas. She writes that she has always heard that God is pure Spirit and because of this we will not be able to see him, not even in eternity. She hopes that this is not the case, for she wants to see God. So that is her question, Will we see God?

There are better reasons for concluding that we will not see God than that God is pure Spirit, the main one being that the Bible states plainly that no person has ever seen God or can see him, as quoted above. Moreover, in Ex. 33:20 God himself is quoted as saying, "You cannot see My face, for no man shall see Me and live." Ex. 19:21 warns that anyone who gazes upon God shall perish, and in Lev.16:2 Aaron is warned that if he sees God in the Holy Place he will die. In Ex. 3:6 Moses hides his face lest he look upon God.

Over against all this is that great beatitude that assures us that we shall indeed see God: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt. 5:8). Several Old Testament characters affirm that they saw God, including Jacob, who not only in some way wrestled with God but afterward said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (Gen. 32:30). Isaiah saw himself as "undone" or disintegrated and as a man of unclean lips, for "my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:5). Gideon said he saw the Angel of the Lord face to face, and he feared it would cost him his lite, but God told him that he would not die (Judges 6:22-23). Ex. 24:9-11 tells how 74 people, including Moses, went into the mountain of God where "they saw the God of Israel," and it says they saw sapphire stone pavement at God's feet, and "it was like the very heavens in its clarity." Here the Bible tells us not only that 74 people saw God but they saw him clearly!

Moses not only saw God but talked to him “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex 33:11). In Ex. 12:6-8 God declares that ifthere is a prophet among his people he will speak to him in a vision or in a dream, but because of Moses’ faithfulness “I speak to him face to face, even plainly and not in dark sayings, and he sees the form of the Lord.”

The answer to the question of whether we shall see God, or if people have indeed seen God, appears to be both yes and no. It is almost certain that no one has ever seen God in any absolute sense, or seen him in the fullness of his glory. This is surely impossible for mortal man or for any of God’s creation, and this is why the Bible plainly states that no one has ever seen God or ever will see him. The clue is in the last reference, where Moses is said to have seen the *form* of God. This is consistent with Moses’ plea to God, “Please, show me your glory.” God tells him that this cannot be, “You cannot see My face, for no man shall see Me and live.” God then places Moses in the cleft of a rock and covers his eyes with his hand. He then passes before Moses in his glory, and at last God removes his hand in time for Moses to see his back (Ex. 33:18-23).

We have here of course a great deal of symbolism, anthropomorphism's they are called, and we are overwhelmed by the mystery of it all. God of course does not actually have a face as we know faces, nor a hand or a back. The rich symbolism points to an intimate relationship with God. Moses must have “seen” God as closely as any mortal ever has, along with the likes of Isaiah and Elijah. Moses saw God’s back, but not his face! It may sound crude to a modern reader, but it was ancient Israel’s way of conveying a vital truth: God is so majestic that he dwells in unapproachable light, and yet he reveals himself to certain ones to the degree that they can experience his presence. The theologians refer to it as an epiphany, God appearing in some way to certain chosen ones.

Sometimes God revealed himself through dreams and visions, and “at various times and in different ways God spoke to our fathers through the prophets” (Heb. 1:1). Sometimes it was by an angelic visit, even by “the Angel of the Lord,” who had a special visitation mission in the Old Testament. We know of course that Jacob did not actually wrestle with God, even if he put that interpretation upon his experience. But Jacob had an ecstatic, life-changing experience that brought him into close fellowship with God, an epiphany, and that is what matters. But he did not actually see God. The great prophet Isaiah saw God sitting upon a throne “high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.” This was God’s way of revealing himself to the prophet in symbols that he could

understand, but we are not to conclude that God actually wears a robe anymore than the prayer “Hide me under the shadow of Your wings” (Ps. 17:8) means that God has feathers. Nor did Isaiah see the God of heaven in any ultimate sense.

All these passages have to conform to the great truths about God as set forth in 1 Tim. 6:15-16, which is one of the great doxologies of Scripture.

God is the blessed and only Potentate or Sovereign, which means he is the Ruler of all the universe.

God is King over all kings and Lord over all lords, a truth that is inviolable whether it is recognized by earthly authorities or not.

God alone has immortality, which means if we have eternal life it is God’s gift to us and not by our own nature.

God dwells in unapproachable light, which means he transcends our time and space, and that no human effort can even begin to penetrate his infinity.

No one has ever seen God or can see him, a truth that stands with the rest of the doxology, and at least means that God is beyond our comprehension and cannot be seen as we see the finite things of our world.

What a difference Jesus Christ makes! In Romans Paul uses a glorious word to point up the difference that Jesus makes. It is the word access. Speaking of God’s grace, the apostle writes, “Through Christ we have access by faith into this grace” (Rom. 5:2). In Christ we have access to God who is otherwise unapproachable. Even though God is King of the universe we have the access that a child has to its father. Even though God alone has immortality we have access to eternal life. Even though God can be neither seen nor comprehended by finite man in Christ we have access into his presence and fellowship.

To the degree that God can be revealed to finite man Jesus Christ is the perfect revelation of God. The New Testament puts great emphasis upon this truth, such as Col. 1:15: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation,” and Heb. 1:3: “who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.” And so one apostle wrote, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14).

When his disciples asked Jesus to show them the Father, he replied, “He who has seen me has seen the Father also.” That is why the apostles had no problem in saying that “God was in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:19) and “the fulness of God dwelt in Christ” (Col. 1:19). They never quite said that Jesus was actually God, but he was the Son of God, the likeness of God, the equal of God, the fulness of God, and the very image of God.

This is the only answer we really need to our sister’s question: Yes, we see God when we see Jesus Christ. We now see Jesus by faith, but in heaven we shall see him face to face, as a person like ourselves and adorned in a glorious body. When we see him we will see the likeness of God. But will we see the Father? Yes, of course, for in Christ we will have access to him on into heaven. But actually seeing God is different from actually seeing Christ, for even in heaven Jesus is a human being. When we see Jesus we will be seeing another human being, only far more glorious. That is not the case with the Father who always, we may suppose, dwells in unapproachable light.

In heaven we will see the Father as much as finite beings can behold the infinite, surely more than we can now see. It might be something like looking into the heavens from the earth. We see but a tiny portion of the universe, as glorious as it is. Even if catapulted through the heavens as fast as light travels, we would still see but a fraction of the universes that unfold before us, even after aeons of light years. I envision seeing the Father like that. Since he is infinity itself and beyond our “seeing,” we shall behold his splendor from one level of glory to another, and throughout eternity we will never see but a fraction of his magnanimity.

We will forever be praising God, learning about God, and seeing more and more of his grandeur. But we will never see him in the fulness of his glory. This is because we will never become gods but will always be finite, limited in comparison to God. Jesus is also infinite, of course, as he is equal to God. But Jesus is a man like us, even in heaven, and that makes all the difference. That is the incomprehensible mystery, that Jesus is God but he is also man. I can envision talking to Jesus in heaven, along with all “the spirits of just people made perfect.”

But can we envision talking to God as we would to Jesus and to each other? I reckon that even in heaven God will still dwell in unapproachable light, and even though we will “see” him more gloriously than now, we will forever be approaching his unapproachable splendor.

It remains to be said to our Arkansas sister that we are not to miss seeing God in this world. In an important sense we see him in our fellow human beings, for we are created in his image. We especially see him in the innocence of childhood and in the dispossessed and deprived of earth, who are probably closer to him. We see and hear him in the beauty and mystery of nature, in great music, art, literature, and poetry. We see him in the unfolding history of mankind, for he is in history and the God of history. We see him as he rules in the affairs of nations. We see his providence, his long suffering, his mercy, and even his wrath.

But God also sees in our world. Alexander Pope in his figuring it both ways when he wrote:

Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,
A hero perish or a sparrow fall,
And now a bubble burst, and now a world.

Our sister says she wants to see God. She will be blessed for her desire, and she has the promise of Christ that it will be so, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." We should stand in awe of such a promise and realize that it is a hope that reaches beyond our comprehension. To think of seeing God upwards and onward and forever and ever, from glory to glory, is almost too much for us to take in. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain it" (Ps. 137:6). —*the Editor*

In a true sense it is only because God is God that he is big enough to allow human free will to lead such awful calamities as those of which the world is full and yet know that ultimately he can so handle the situation as to bring out of chaos the achievement of his purpose with nothing of final value ultimately lost.--Leslie D. Weatherhead, *This is the Victory*

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THE ESSENCE OF THE CAMPBELL PLEA

James Wallis was one of the heroes of the Stone-Campbell Movement in Britain. Once a Scotch Baptist, he accepted "the Plea" through the writings of Alexander Campbell. For over a quarter of a century he yielded considerable influence among the British churches as the editor of the *Christian Messenger,* a journal he himself founded.

In 1837 he wrote a letter to Mr. Campbell, which was published both in his paper and Mr. Campbell's, in which he named what he saw as the essence of "the reformation" led by Mr. Campbell, the term he always used to identify the Movement. Wallis' insight is of value to us, not only because it provides some understanding of how our British pioneers in those days compared in their thinking to our pioneers in America, but it challenges us to have a more precise concept of what our pioneers were trying to do. We are usually rather vague in our understanding as to what it was all about. But there was nothing vague about Wallis' concept. He wrote as follows to Mr. Campbell in reference to what he called "that all important truth":

> It is to you, brother Campbell, under the providence of a kind and gracious God, that myself and others in this place are indebted for a more clear and correct knowledge of that all-important truth which in these days of darkness is kept so much out of view — viz, that the religion of Jesus is founded altogether upon the knowledge and belief of facts, instead of abstract influences of mystic operations upon the mind. *(Mill. Harb.,* 1837, p.239)

The Britisher saw in Campbell's movement what has been unclear to many Americans: that Campbell called for the unity of all Christians only upon an allegiance to the facts of the gospel. Campbell saw a fact as something done. In reference to the gospel that would be what God has done through Christ for man's redemption. This distinguishes a fact from a truth —all facts are of course truths, but all truths are not facts. That God exists is a truth, that God created the universe is a fact as well as a truth. Believers become one when they believe and respond to what God has done in Christ, *facts*, not by opinions, theories, or deductions about those facts, even if they are truths. There are many truths that God has given, but only the facts of the gospel save and unite people in Christ.

Brother Campbell thus distinguished between the apostles' doctrine (teaching), which consists of many truths, and the gospel, which consists of such basic facts as the death (for our sins), burial, and resurrection of Christ. In believing and obeying the gospel (facts)

sinners become Christians and are one in Christ. Other truths of Scripture, such as the apostles' teaching, are of course true and important to maturity in the faith, but they are not the gospel, which is what brings us into Christ and makes us one.

There are many Scriptures that point up this distinction, but 1 Cor 4:15 is especially clear: "Though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." Paul was the spiritual father of the Corinthians because it was he that preached the gospel to them. Once in Christ by believing and obeying the gospel, they had numerous teachers who instructed them in doctrine. The apostle makes the same distinction in 1 Cor. 15:1-4 where he defines the gospel he had preached to them as the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

If we Americans all these years could have been as insightful as James Wallis, it would have spared us many crippling divisions. In presuming that "all the New Testament" is the gospel and the basis of unity, we have made our own opinions and theories tests of fellowship. Rather than a simple response to the gospel we have made societies, instrumental music, Sunday Schools, methods of serving Communion, etc. conditions of accepting each other as faithful brethren. We have deceived ourselves into concluding that such things are part of the gospel since they are deductions we draw from something the New Testament says or doesn't say. We badly err when we make our opinion or preference, such as singing only acappella, part of the gospel.

The Britisher saw clearly what happens when something beside the gospel itself is made a test of fellowship. After telling Mr. Campbell about a new church that had begun in Nottingham, England on Christmas Day, 1836, based on "the principles of the reformation," he said in the same letter: "I trust that we are all fully convinced that so long as human opinions are to be made the bond of union in the congregation of the Messiah, there will of necessity be divisions among the disciples:"

I fear that after a century and a half we are not fully convinced, for we go right on separating from each other over our opinions and deductions. Differences among believers do not themselves divide, for Christians always have and always will have differences, just as Peter and Paul had. It is making our differences a test of fellowship. It is the old satanic attitude of, "If you don't agree with me and do it my way, then you are unfaithful to the gospel and I will not accept you."

But we have blessings to count. We have those through history, like James Wallis of England, who clearly discerned what our heritage is all about. We can save ourselves from obscurantism and sectarianism by taking to heart these principles of our heritage. They are wonderfully simple and simply wonderful. The first is that we can all unite upon the facts of the gospel, even when we differ on the implications of those facts. The second is that whenever we allow opinions to be made tests of fellowship it will necessarily cause division among believers.

These truths will show us that we can have churches that support certain agencies and those that do not, and yet they can be united and work together and accept each other as equals. We can have churches that are premillennial and some that are amillennial, and even some that have hardly heard of the millennium, and yet be of one heart in serving Jesus Christ. We can have churches that use the instrument in singing and those that are acappella, and even some that hardly sing at all, and yet accept each other in love and forbearance.

This means that, of course, we will be in the fellowship with folk that are "in error," for we are all in error on some things since none of us is perfect. It is the nature of the error that matters. Our forebears were discerning in this regards also. Brother Campbell distinguished between errors of the mind ("imbecility of intellect" he called it) and errors of the heart, the latter being much more serious.

One might be sincerely mistaken about various doctrines (He is still growing!) and yet right about Jesus Christ. That should be no threat to fellowship. It is only when one is unfaithful to Jesus Christ, when he has a bad heart, or when he rejects the simplicity of the gospel itself that unity and fellowship are made impossible. —*the Editor*

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JOHN LOCKE: CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHER

One reason John Locke is one of my heroes of history is that he had such a salutary influence upon Alexander Campbell and the movement he launched for the unity of all Christians. Campbell not only spoke of him with great appreciation but also referred to him as "the Christian philosopher." Locke deserves the accolade, not only because he was committed to Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of all true philosophy, but also because he used his great talents to defend those who were persecuted by the Church of England, Locke's own church, for their dissident views. He dared to name toleration as "the chief characteristic mark of the true Church" at a time when the Anglican church was most

intolerant. He told his own church that it was more tolerant of whoredom, fraud, and malice than of conscientious dissent. That kind of talk was enough to gain the admiration of Alexander Campbell.

But John Locke (1632-1704) had an influence that reached far beyond the American frontier of the early 19th century and Campbell's reformation efforts. Will Durant refers to him as "the greatest philosopher of this age" and notes that he reached a reputation in philosophy that was surpassed only by Newton's in science and that people spoke of him as "the philosopher." He is a good example of how the pen is more powerful than the sword, for long after his death his writings were given credit for inspiring three revolutions in behalf of representative government: the Cromwellian Revolution in England, the French Revolution, and the American Revolution. They all found their philosophical defense in Locke's great thesis that men may rule only by the consent of the governed. Locke used that one idea —consent —to challenge the ancient tradition that kings (often tyrants!) rule by divine right and make way for democracy and representative government.

In our day when we witness such dramatic changes in Eastern Europe, fired by the revolutionary spirit of the people, we may rightfully look back to John Locke, who defended the right of an oppressed people to rebel against their government when all peaceful means have been exhausted. The power to rule is given by God to the people, Locke insisted, which they confer upon their chosen representative, a position which he holds in trust for the sake of law and order and the good of society. When he violates that trust, the people may ask for the office back (peaceful means); if he persists in his tyrannical ways, they may wrest the office from him (revolutionary means). Divine right resides with the people, not the king. Consent! Locke changed the world with that one idea, and that is the idea behind the great change that has come over Eastern Europe.

It was the idea that inspired the formation of our own republic. All our founding documents are in part Lockean inspired and rooted in the concept of consent, whether the idea of "a government of the people, for the people, and by the people" or that "all men are created free and equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." In that Declaration of Independence Thomas Jefferson went on to write, "That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." When Jefferson wrote those words John Locke's writings were near at hand.

It is remarkable that some of the founding documents of our own Stone-Campbell Movement were also Lockean inspired. Some scholars of our history, such as W. E. Garrison, contend that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between what Locke said and

what Thomas Campbell wrote in the *Declaration and Address.* He points to these words as an example:

> Since men are so solicitous about the true church, I would only ask them here, by the way, if it be no more agreeable to the Church of Christ to make the conditions of communion consist in such things, and such things only, as the Holy Spirit declared, in express words, to be necessary to salvation.

Nothing could be more Campbellian than those words and nothing could better capture the essence of our plea for the unity of all Christians, but they come from John Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration.* He wrote those words while in hiding, for the Church of England had issued its Thirty-Nine Articles as the basis for the Act of Uniformity, dogmas that people had to accept. Dissent was not tolerated. Only in his will was Locke free to acknowledge that he was the author. Concerning the Thirty-Nine Articles and all other creeds conceived by men Locke asked ecclesiastical leaders why they had to impose on people their own interpretations and inventions, "such things as the Holy Scriptures do not mention; or at least not expressly command." That too has the Campbell ring!

Locke laid down a principle of unity that is classic, one that would be appropriate at any ecumenical conference: *Nothing is to be made a test of communion that God has not made necessary to salvation.* That rule would go far in settling our divisions, and it goes far in summarizing the call for unity as made by Barton Stone and the Campbells. Locke went on to challenge every sect that makes laws out of its own opinions and interpretations, again reflecting the spirit of our own heritage:

> How can that be called the Church of Christ which is established on laws that are not His, and which excludes such persons from its communion as He will one day receive into the Kingdom of Heaven, I understand not.

Locke also impacted his age and ours with his controversial *Essay on Human Understanding,* which has been described as the greatest treatise on human psychology ever written. When it was condemned by Oxford University, Locke wrote to a friend that he considered the condemnation a recommendation. It was condemned because it challenged the traditional position on how knowledge is derived, which allowed that at least some knowledge is innate, inborn, or intuitive, and that some knowledge is given of God and therefore "natural," which gave place to "natural religion." Since the time of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas the churches as well as society had contended that knowledge comes

through reason, and the church held that God's existence could be proved by reason. Locke questioned all this when he concluded that all knowledge comes through experience by way of our sensations and reflections.

At birth the mind is a *tabula rasa*, a blank page, Locke held, and there is no such thing as innate (inborn) ideas, not even an idea of God. We know God only by God revealing himself to us, primarily through Scripture and the person of Christ. Nature, including our conscience, confirms what God reveals about himself, but is not itself a means of knowing God. As the father of empiricism (knowledge comes only through sense impressions) Locke rejected feelings and mystical experiences as valid sources of knowledge. Knowledge consists of facts, which are things said or done, not dreams, visions, opinions, or even deductive systems. His approach to knowledge was thus inductive and scientific, based upon an application of the mind to the evidence available. He applied this method to the study of the Bible.

Campbell was influenced by Locke in his plea for unity based upon the facts of Scripture, allowing for differences in the area of opinions and deductions. The motto, "In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty" is Lockean, and to both Locke and Campbell matters of faith were matters of fact -- believing facts based upon evidence. Campbell was thus willing to call for a unity based upon "the seven facts of Eph. 4." There are of course many opinions about those seven facts —one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God —but it is the facts (not the opinions about them!) that both save and unite. This is why both men could call for unity based upon the Bible and the Bible alone. What they really meant was the facts (or the essentials) of the Bible. While people can never agree on opinions about the Bible (and so they should allow liberty), they can agree on the facts (things actually said or done) of the Bible, which is the only ground of unity that is possible.

It is therefore understandable that the Campbellite preachers on the American frontier were known to carry three books in their saddlebags: a Bible, a hymnal, and a copy of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding.* If in 17th century Europe Locke opened up a new way of looking at knowledge in general, the Campbell movement in 19th century America opened up a new way of looking at the Bible and religious experience.
Locke also had considerable to say about faith and reason, a subject that has always interested our people in the Stone-Campbell movement. One of Locke's most influential works was *On the Reasonableness of Christianity* in which he contended that the Christian religion addresses itself to human reason as well as to the emotions. He insisted that the mind matters as well as the heart. The faithful Christian is to think responsibly. Locke had a neat way of saying, "I find every sect, as far as reason will help them, make use of it gladly; but when it fails them, they cry out, 'It is a matter of faith and above reason.'" He

found no conflict between faith and reason, for it is reason that implements the faith. Indeed, it is reason that determines if certain evidence is strong enough to produce faith. Campbell was especially impressed with one proposition that Locke postulated, that our faith in anything should be only as strong as the evidence to support it.

Some of Locke's conclusions about faith and reason would make useful questions for discussion, such as, "No proposition can be received for divine revelation if it be contrary to our clear intuitive knowledge." This is why we would all reject the interpretation that the offending eye and hand that Jesus refers to are to be literally plucked out or cut off so as to avoid sinning. Such a view is contrary to reason. But can we agree that another set of verses are not to be interpreted in such a way that degrades women to a state of inequality in the church and radically limits their ministry because it is also offensive to our intuitive knowledge?

Locke says that "Reason must be our last judge and guide in everything," for only reason can make possible a good conscience. One must be "fully assured in his own mind," as Paul puts it, and only reason makes this possible. This is one of the keys to valid interpretation of the Bible, for it is only through reason that we determine what a particular passage means and how it applies to us. If we concede that everything in the Bible is not the word of God for us, which is apparent enough, then is it not only through reason that we determine what is and what is not the word of God, based upon the evidence available? Reason might be aided by prayer, a searching heart, and the leading of the Holy Spirit, but it is still reason that has to serve as arbiter. Each of us has his own supreme court, which is our own conscience monitored by the intellect.

This kind of emphasis on reason caused our pioneers to be accused of "head religion" and of neglecting the heart. They were charged with knowing nothing of "experimental religion." If they went too far in stressing "reasonable Christianity" it was because the emotionalism of an extreme Calvinism had so confused the nature of faith that people relied more on their feelings than on revelation. That is why Campbell insisted that while Christianity is indeed a heart religion it must first address the head. It was said of Locke that he swept away a lot of "metaphysical lumber" in clarifying the nature of knowledge. It could be said of Campbell that he swept away a lot of theological speculation in clarifying the nature of religion.

John Locke never married. He gave his 72 years, a long life in his day, to the service of both the church and the world. While he took a degree in medicine, he served the British government as secretary to Lord Shaftsbury, where his political fortunes rose and waned. He spent a lot of time in exile and even in hiding where he did most of his writing,

but he published nothing substantial until he was 57. He was controversial but nonetheless influential. While he is generally recognized as one of the founders of modem philosophy, he exemplified how one can be a noted philosopher and a committed Christian.

To his dying day he was a defender of the persecuted, defending the right of dissent. At the time of his death he was writing yet another essay on toleration. If the persecuted are blessed, then those who defend the persecuted will be blessed. In the last years of his life Locke read the New Testament as if he had never read it before (an approach Campbell once advised), and found himself enamored by the beautiful spirit of Christ. He was persuaded that it was only in that beautiful spirit that Christians would find unity. In his dying hour he praised God for his grace and mercy, and thanked him for giving him a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was the finest hour for a philosopher who had given his life to an understanding of the nature of knowledge. — *the Editor*

> John Locke's temper was too well balanced to take acrimonious criticism to heart. Indeed, as he grew older, his thoughts turned more and more to religion, and he spent his last years studying the Epistles of St. Paul. He died in 1704, surrounded by devoted friends to whom he declared that he left this world "in perfect charity with all men and in sincere communion with the whole church of Christ, by whatever names Christ's followers call themselves."--W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy*

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FELLOWSHIP OF THE LIKE-MINDED

If there be any fellowship of the Spirit, make full my joy by being like-minded. — Philip. 2:1-2

I thought of writing this article while I was in the hospital in Houston, but I was too busy trying to get well so I could get out of the place. A hospital is no place to be when you're sick! Let's just say that I thought out this piece while in the hospital, and I put it into words now that I am at home convalescing.

It was a nurse named Mary that led me to draw some of the conclusions herein. She came to America some years ago from Nigeria, and is of course black. She is a Carmelite nun. All that I knew about this order was that it is very old and that its name was taken from Mt. Carmel in Palestine where it was founded. Mary explained that the order's mission was to serve people in the name of Christ. It is a cloistered order, which means its work is done mostly in seclusion and away from the public eye. Mary took a leave of absence from the order so she could go back into the world and get more education. She graduated from Spelman College in Atlanta and is now in the School of Nursing of Texas Woman's University, which is part of the impressive 17-institution complex of the Texas Medical Center in Houston. But she had already been a nurse in her order in Nigeria. She may not return to her order, for she is considering becoming a secular nurse and working in a Catholic hospital in this country. Her only interest is to serve Christ by serving others.

Mary was my night nurse, and during those first few nights she was an angel of mercy. And a bit fussy, the take-charge kind of gal. If I erred in some detail, she would score me with, "What are you doing that for?" She knew that I was a sick Indian and she watched over me not unlike a mother hen with her chicks. Through my I.V. I was already getting some morphine, and I only needed to press a button to get more, if I needed it for pain. My day nurse told me not to worry about how much I pressed the button, for it was regulated so that I could not get too much. But Mary would caution me to bear a little pain and forego more morphine, and once I was through with the I.V. and took pain pills only on request, Mary would urge me to take as few as possible. "It is better for you to be in control, not the drugs," she would advise. I was a good patient and heeded her advice.

It was evident to me that Mary was special. She had a genuine interest in her patients. In her countenance I saw the love of Christ. When I spoke of our common faith, and asked her if it was her devotion to Christ that made her such an attentive nurse, she replied, "Yes, of course." She served me and others as if she were serving Jesus. I told her that I shared her view of life, to serve Christ by serving others, that this is what being a Christian is all about.

In those night hours in that hospital Mary and I found a common bond. There was an absent Friend whose Spirit was present, and he made us like-minded. Eventually that line from Scripture came to mind: "If there is any fellowship of the Spirit, make full my joy by being like-minded." I was reminded that when the apostle called for like-mindedness he was not talking about seeing everything alike, nor was he calling for some kind of doctrinal conformity, but he was pleading for Christlikeness. We are like-minded when together we are Christlike!

The nurse and I would surely have some doctrinal differences, and they might be important, but it was the Person we shared in common that drew us together. It was our mutual devotion and commitment to Jesus Christ that created the "fellowship of the Spirit" between us. We were like-minded in that we both found in Jesus the focal point of our lives. This is what made the heart of the apostle Paul joyful, when the Philippians found in Christ a common bond. Paul would have had no cause to rejoice just because people agreed on doctrinal matters. Joy is the fruit of personal relationship.

Christians can see the millennium differently and still be like-minded. They can differ on ways and means of doing the church's work, and even over such significant doctrines as baptism and the eucharist and yet be like-minded. They are like-minded, not because of doctrinal agreement, but because together they have the mind of Christ. To be like-minded is to share a sincere commitment to the lordship of Jesus Christ. If two people have resolved in their hearts and minds to follow Jesus Christ the best they know how they are like-minded, and this is the basis of fellowship. When two people like this meet they are immediately drawn together by that joy that the apostle spoke of.

This in no wise makes Christian doctrine unimportant. People who are like-minded will be of the mind to learn all the sound doctrine they can, for they realize that this builds them up in the holy faith. It only means that people can and will differ as they learn doctrine together (or separately), if for no other reason because they differ in age, opportunity, and ability. It is like any family of sisters and brothers, who, for all their differences are like-minded in that together they love their parents and are committed to the welfare of the family.

The apostle confirms this view when he goes on in that passage to elaborate on what like-minded means — "having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." If this is made to mean that we have to see all doctrine alike, and thus be of "one mind" by being of one understanding on all the issues, then it is impossible to be like-minded. It has never happened in any church or even between two people, and it never will, for we never see everything alike.

But when we see that "having the same love" means that we have the love of Christ in our hearts, and being of "one accord" means to have the single purpose of following Christ, we can readily see not only the wisdom of such an injunction but also its possibility and practicability. We can be like-minded. It is not a matter of effort as much as yielding to

the fellowship of the Spirit. Is that not Paul's point? *If* there is any fellowship of the Spirit, he is saying, then there will be like-mindedness, which is unity in Christ. Unity is a gift to be received more than a condition to be attained.

This is why two people who are Christlike (like-minded) do not have to work at it to be in fellowship, for they are immediately bonded by the Spirit within them. When Mary, the Nigerian, and I discovered each other in the dimness of a hospital room, there was a bond that made us one. We were the recipients of a common gift, the unity of the Spirit.

This is the fellowship of the like-minded, which transcends race, color, age, sex, nationality, and circumstance of birth. Its bonding power is love, which binds everything together in perfect unity. —*the Editor*

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CONSTRUCTING AN IMAGE OF GOD

Robert L. Johnson

From the first century on there has been no end to the controversy over the nature of the God of the Bible. In the second century Marcion held the view that there were two Gods, the good Father of Jesus and the Creator known in the Old Testament. Later others dared to say with the disciples of the Arian, Aetios, "I know God as He is known to Himself." This was denied by John of Antioch (Chrysostom) in the fourth century who said "He insults God who seeks to apprehend His essential being," and he goes on to urge that "God is incomprehensible even in His works; how much more in His own essential nature. . . (and) how much more in His own transcendent majesty. . ."

Chrysostom found some support for his views in the writings of Paul, especially the following, (God) "dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Tim. 6:16). And from Rom. 11:33, "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways." For Chrysostom "the exceeding greatness" of God is beyond man's mental grasp and compass. He is incomprehensible.

Most of us would be closer to Paul and Chrysostom than we would be to Aeetes, but nevertheless we still go on struggling to construct an image of God to which we can relate. There is no shortage of descriptive terminology in the Bible.

Some of the names of God in the Old Testament suggest images. Yahweh was or became the personal name for the God of Israel. The origin of the name may be uncertain, but in Ex. 3:13-15 it appears to be connected with the verb "to be." Yahweh is interpreted as meaning the self-subsistent Being, or the "really existing One" as distinguished from other gods. Or similarly, He is the "I-will-be-with-thee God," a God who is ever present with His people. "El" or "Elohim" is perhaps the most common name for God. The root of this word probably meant "to be strong." Strength was the primary characteristic of Deity. "EI Shaddai" is often translated "God Almighty," although the term should not be restricted to that meaning. "EI Elyon" is translated as the "Exalted One" or "Most High," but it later became a synonym for "Yahweh." Several other names and appellations for God are also found in the Old Testament.

Whatever our image of God, it cannot be impersonal or inanimate, but only a Being who can respond to us and be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

In both Old and New Covenants the Lord is pictured as a God of wrath. There are literally dozens of passages in the Old Testament and numerous verses in the New Testament that speak of the fierce wrath and anger of God. Whatever image of God we may have we should never discount the fact that God's judgment is real. It has to be real if he is a righteous God. If God were so indifferent to what happened to his children that sin made no difference to him, then he would not be worth worshiping. Paul is unequivocal, "For the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness" (Rom. 1:18). Jesus was equally clear, "Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt. 10:28). The writer of Hebrews adds his witness, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31), and "For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29).

We are all fond of the "Shepherd" /Protector image of God in Psalm 23 and other places where the shepherd goes in search of the lost sheep. Most of us probably prefer the Father image of God which is found especially in the New Testament. "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him" (Ps. 103:13). "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: 'Our Father who art in heaven'" (Mt. 6:8-9). The Father image is easily the most prominent in the New Testament, and yet this image is inadequate. The best fatherhood we know is only a pale suggestion of the Divine. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?" (Mt. 7:11). This image of Fatherhood makes worship possible. If God were a mere substance or force we couldn't praise him or confess our sins to him any more than we could to the force of gravitation.

As we try to construct an image of God we must add the statements of Jesus, "God is Spirit (Jn. 4:24), and of John, "God is love" (1 In. 4:8). Francis McConnell once wrote:

> God is the Eternal Mind, Eternal Spirit, Divine Love. But Divine Love doesn't mean cosmic amiability, always smiling. It is a seriousness of purpose that is continually working toward the moral uplifting of men. It includes a large willingness to forgive and forget. . . but moral purpose must rule every pulsation of the Divine affection.

One of the most common attributes of God is His merciful kindness, as in Ps. 103:8, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love," and 1 Tim. 1:13 where Paul remembers being a persecutor, "I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief." But Paul also knows that God "has mercy upon whomever he wills and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills" (Rom. 9:18).

We read that God is a God of wrath. He condemns. But He is also a God of mercy. Is there a conflict between the mercy of God and the justice of God? What does this do to the image of God that is evolving in our minds? It seems that we are involved again in a problem of interpretation. If we project God as a cosmic Lawgiver, are we restricting God's own freedom to make exceptions for one who may fall short in his law-keeping? If the Jews, with their 613 laws of Do's and Don'ts, could not be justified by law-keeping, then do we assume that the Christian will be justified when he has only about 250 commandments to observe? How many of us even come close to living up to the ideal of the Sermon on the Mount or strictly observe the list of imperatives in Col. 3?

There would appear to be other criteria which must be worked into the equation, such as the degree of one's knowledge being a factor in imputing his responsibility. To the Pharisees Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt, but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains" (Jn. 9:41), and "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin" (Jn. 15:22). Many scholars contend that the point of Rom. 2:12-16 is that one will be judged by what he actually knows or has had the opportunity to know. This is within the scope of Jesus' teaching in Lk. 12:48, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required."

My accountability is much greater than the one who cannot read, who has never heard of Christ, or who has been misinformed concerning salvation. *—2208 W. Granite, Siloam Springs. Ar. 72761*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Since we cannot respond to each of you personally as we would like, Ouida and I will use this means to thank you for the many letters, cards, and calls that came from all over the country in reference to my recent surgery. We are persuaded that the good will and prayers on the part of so many made a difference. At this writing (29 January) I am feeling well, have regained much of my strength, and am back to work several hours a day. In another month I will return to Houston for another round of tests that we hope will confirm that I am now free of cancer. The surgery was apparently successful, with the surgeon "90 percent plus certain" that he removed all the cancer when he removed my prostate gland. He told us the tumor was small and confined to the prostate. We hope the tests next month will confirm this and show that I have need of no further treatment, such as radiation. It is now almost certain that I went to Houston with cancer and returned without it, and that is a great blessing. We were both impressed with the magnificence of the Texas Medical Center and felt that we were in the hands of real pros. I was in Methodist Hospital, which is one of the 17 institutions making up the Center and a teaching facility for the Baylor School of Medicine. I would sometimes have five or six doctors around my bed atone time —the top surgeon, residence surgeons, and student doctors. It is also a research hospital, so I became part of a nation-wide study. A lot of research is going on in urological surgery, especially in reference to early detection of prostate cancer, which presently is the second highest cause of death in older men. Ouida was with me all the way. She stayed at the elegant Marriott across the street from the hospital, which is joined by a second floor walkway. It was like being in the same building. Ouida had one tense moment. The surgeon, who is a handsome Italian and renowned as a specialist in prostate cancer, told her he would first remove my lymph nodes and send them to pathology and that the surgical team would wait for them to be tested for cancer. If the report was positive they would not continue the surgery, for that would mean the cancer had spread and there would be no need to continue, and that would be bad news. After awhile (I was in surgery four and a half hours) he sent word to her that the nodes tested negative and that they were continuing. We had an amusing moment in this long ordeal. Once the surgery was over Ouida couldn't locate me —not in the recovery room, not in intensive care. I did so well that, after a brief stay in recovery, they returned me to my room. When she finally found me, she says I said to her, "It was a fine time to leave me, Lucille!," but I don't remember. Once we got into the thick of this thing and saw how serious it was, Ouida was pleased that she was with me, and it meant everything to me to have her there. On the Sunday we were there, friends called on Ouida and took her with them to the Bering Drive Church of Christ, one of our great congregations and one that was praying for me. One final note:

several of you wrote that you or yours had had “prostate surgery,” supposing it is what I had. Probably not, for less than 1% of prostate surgery is a radical prostatectomy. When this first began I thought I would only have a transurethal remission (the “reeming out” job), which is not open surgery, but it turned out to be more serious than that. Ouida and I thank you for caring in your sweet, quiet way. We are ready to forget the whole thing and get on with our lives. In have a word of admonition from all this, it would be to make sure you have adequate insurance, which we do. To go to a hospital these days for major surgery, you can count on it costing at least $2,000 a day. If the surgery doesn’t do you in, the costs will!

One of our readers, Earl Edwards of Tulsa, is a retired dentist. He recently joined nine other dentists in a Medical Missions project to Mexico, which is sponsored by Churches of Christ. Each dentist paid his own way and took along his own supplies. They worked in the back country where there was no electricity, so they could only do cleaning and extractions. Working alongside physicians, they endured very hot, humid, rainy weather, sometimes standing in mud up to their ankles. They worked in areas where we have congregations among the Wasteco and Naweh Indians, who suffer from deep poverty. Their church buildings are made of sticks. Since they have no transportation each village has a church of 35 -50 members. Earl reports that he now has a greater appreciation of fellow Christians of another culture.

In his December “California Letter,” J. James Albert says some amazing things. After quoting Alexander Campbell to the effect that the Disciples of Christ were unique in that they required for fellowship only a confession of the “celestial proposition” that Jesus is the Son of God and obedience in baptism into his death. Albert charges that the heirs of the Campbell movement require more than Campbell did, for each sect imposes some doctrinal test of brotherhood. Today, however spiritual a person may be, he cannot enjoy fellowship with any party in the Church of Christ unless he subscribes to an unwritten creed. “No brother is welcome in the party in which I was raised, the one cup, no Sunday School group,” says Albert, “unless he agrees to the correctness of these doctrines. Even if he is willing to abide by the methodology of these practices, but questions their validity, he is not welcomed as Christ welcomed us.” He goes on to say that while he believes in using only one cup for Communion and not using classes, he does not believe they should be made tests of fellowship. He says he has been ostracized by his own folk for taking this position. He notes that all parties within the Church of Christ have departed from the Campbell position, requiring more than faith and baptism. You can get on Albert’s mailing list by writing him at Box 811, Corcoran, Ca. 93212.

The Nashville Tennessean reports that David Lipscomb College recently invited a local rabbi to speak to its students on Judaism. This is a change for the better, for officials of the same college once criticized the Vine Street Christian Church in the same city for doing the same thing.

Flavil Yeakley, an authority on church growth among Churches of Christ, is quoted by a mailout from Magnolia Bible College to the effect that the average tenure among ministers for Churches of Christ is only 18 months. Studies of growing churches indicate that growth starts in the 4th or 5th year of a preacher's tenure.

The Watchtower, published by Jehovah's Witnesses, tells how the Witnesses are taking their message to Japanese business people. They get permission from a company to talk to its employees during lunch break. Wearing a lapel button identifying them as Witnesses, they approach the workers and say, "Excuse me, I was given permission to talk to people here. Would you mind listening to me while you eat?" The report says each Witness uses good judgment and words seasoned with salt.

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READER'S EXCHANGE

Your paper has been the only thing that has kept me holding on. You will never know how much I have enjoyed your articles. They fill my heart with joy. —*Albuquerque, NM*

When illness surprises, it takes us aback, but not, as believers, as though we were unprepared. Faith is always ready for contingencies. They never gain the upper hand. God has more in reserve for you and your wife against the need which has surfaced. He will suffice. We thank Him for his help to you. —*Earl Stuckenbruck, Johnson City, TN.*

I always look forward to each issue and usually read it at one sitting. They are then filed away for further reference. I'll have to admit that the article on "Who Are the Lost?" has challenged me to think about this doctrine in a different manner than I have in the past. —*Dean Melton, East Alton, IL.*

I especially valued the extensive sharing of worship experience with so many varied churches. I am grateful to you for digging up the facts on all these groups and sharing them with us. I consider it a highlight of the past two years. I also thank you for the nice eulogy to our mutual friend, Carl Ketcherside. I'm sure going to miss Carl and Nell. — *Norman Hawbaker, Decatur, IL.*

I was given a year's subscription by a friend. Now that it needs renewal, I enclose a 2-year subscription. —*Poseyville, IN*

(This happens frequently. This is why we urge you to think of others when you renew for yourself. This Hoosier reader would have never known of us if someone had not thought of him. If you get up a club of four or more, including your own renewal, the rate is only $3.00 per name. You might bless someone greatly! —*Ed*.)

Keep the paper coming. I don't always fully agree with all that you write, but you challenge me to broaden my perspective. —*Jerry Clinkscales, Friendswood, TX.*

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BOOK NOTES

Some of our readers have found Faith Martin's *Call Me Blessed* an enlightening study on the ministry of women. It gives a fine balance between a respect for Scripture and the liberation of women from a male dominated culture. It comes to terms with the relevant texts as few studies do. We will send you a copy for $8.95 postpaid.

Moses Lard, That Prince of Preachers by Kenneth Van Deusen is an interesting and informative account of a complex figure in our history. This book lays bare both the ecstasy and the agony of Lard's life, as in the last chapter on "The Final Years: The Sorrow and Bitterness." $14.95 postpaid.

With some difficulty we have obtained copies of *The Shepherd of the Hills* by Harold Bell Wright, an old classic dealing with simple values in conflict with worldly wisdom in Ozark hill country. $10.50 postpaid.

K. C. Moser was among the Church of Christ's first liberals in that he rooted his teaching in the grace of God, including baptism. His two books, *The Gist of Romans* and *The Way of Salvation* are, fortunately, still in print and available at $6.50 each, postpaid.

John R. W. Stott's great little book, *What Christ Thinks of the Church*, is now out of print. We were able to get a fistful of the last ones. We will send you one for $5.95 post-paid.

F. F. Bruce's *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* is a veritable gold mine of information, and it is F. F. Bruce at his best. $21.95 postpaid.

We can now announce for sure that Carl Ketcherside's autobiography, *Pilgrimage of Joy*, will be published this spring. I have just completed writing the introduction for it. His story is a delight to read. It is important that we have your order in advance. We will send you a copy as soon as it is off the press, postpaid, if you send a check for $15.00.

(These titles may be ordered from us.)

Our new bound volume for 1987-88 entitled *The Sense of Scripture: Studies in Interpretation* is now ready at $12.50 plus postage, $14.00 total. This volume matches the previous volumes. The bound volume 1985-86 is also available at the same price. All seven of our bound volumes, dating back to 1977 are offered at the special price of $65.00 postpaid.

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